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My First Duty

TWELVE SHORT INSTRUCTIONS
ON MY DUTY TOWARDS GOD

JULIET C. SMITH

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My First Duty

TWELVE SHORT INSTRUCTIONS ON
"MY DUTY TOWARDS GOD"

BY
JULIET C. SMITH
Author of "Echoes from the Psalter"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GEORGE H. McGREW, D.D.

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My duty towards God is to believe in him, to fear him, and to love him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength: To worship him, to give him thanks: to put my whole trust in him, to call upon him, to honour his holy name and his word: and to serve him truly all the days of my life.

INTRODUCTION.

THIS little book is meant to serve as a mint for recoining the well-worn truths which the Catechism states about our Duty to God. It is written in a plain way, because it was intended chiefly for the older pupils in our Sunday Schools, with whom the gifted author has had a large experience. At the same time, it should not fail to be of use to others, by calling attention to the hidden richness in this neglected part of the Catechism. The emphasis which in our time is laid upon our duty to our fellow-men is likely to obscure our first duty to God, unless the latter is repeatedly urged.

The teaching of this book will be found to be sound and in accord with the Catholic Faith. My prayer is that it may serve to impress upon all who read it the fact that the first and great commandment is to love God, and that he who keeps this law cannot fail to love Man also.

GEORGE H. MCGREW.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S PARISH HOUSE,
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I.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO BELIEVE IN HIM.

MY FIRST DUTY.

I.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO BELIEVE IN HIM.

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is."—Heb. xi. 6.

THE expression "believing in God" may mean simply believing that there is a God; or it may mean trusting him to do what is best for us in this world, and to bring us, for the sake of his blessed Son, to the home which he has prepared for us above. We will consider that the words have the former meaning when we study our "duty toward God;" first, because believing that there is a God is necessary if we wish to do our

duty to him ; and, secondly, because, a little farther along in this answer, we come to the words, " To put my whole trust in him," which will give us an opportunity to consider what trust is.

You who read this little book probably believe that there is a God. Otherwise you would hardly take the trouble to read it. You believe in God, I suppose, because you have been taught about him by your mother, or your clergyman, or your Sunday-school teacher. You may know that he has answered the prayers of some of your friends or acquaintances ; or you may have seen some one who has been very wicked suddenly leave his sinful ways and become a different person, and you are told that this wonderful change has come about because he gave himself to God, and by the Holy Spirit, which is the

gift of God, he was able to lead a new life, which he could not have done in his own strength. Or perhaps you have thought sometimes about God, and noticing all the wonderful things around us — the flowers, the birds, the stars, and the other numerous objects—you have made up your mind that some One more powerful and wiser than any man you ever saw must have created them. But I hope that you have a better reason than these for believing in God. I hope you *know* him ; that when you read your Bible, you feel that it is a message from him ; that when you pray, you are conscious that he is listening to you, and often when you are tempted to do wrong, that you feel that it is only by his grace and by his power that you are able to do right.

We are taught in the Bible, as well as in the Catechism, that we

are to believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and yet that there is but one God. This is not easy to understand; but, after all, we are not asked to understand it, only to believe it. We can and ought to know, however, that it is true that God the Father is our Heavenly Father, and that he sent his Son to save us from sin, and that he is giving us his Holy Spirit to help us to do right.

If we really believed, as the Catechism says, that God the Father made us and all the world, would we be so ready to complain when our life does not suit us, when things seem to go wrong? Surely not if we remembered that our Father planned it for us; or if we realized that God the Son died on the cross to redeem us and all mankind, could we be so careless as we often are? could we think only of pleasing ourselves and give so

little thought to pleasing him? Or if we kept always before us the thought of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifieth us and all the people of God, would we so often be discouraged and ready to give up trying to be good as we are now? Let us think over these solemn questions, and ask ourselves earnestly, "Do I really believe in God?"

COLLECT.

Almighty and everliving God, who, for the greater confirmation of the faith, didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

II.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO FEAR HIM.

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MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO FEAR HIM.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."—Ps. cxi. 10.

"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil."—Prov. viii. 18.

It is sometimes hard to understand why, when the Bible is full of verses about our Heavenly Father's love to us, we should find so many other verses telling us that it is our duty to fear him. The true explanation is that the fear of the Lord really means the fear of offending him; and this is not only the fear of punishment if we do wrong, but a dread of grieving him; a shrinking from doing anything that would displease him; a fear of

sin because it is sin, not simply because it may be followed by punishment. This fear of the Lord, then, will grow in our hearts just as our love for him grows. Have you never felt it harder to bear a reproof from your father or mother than from some stranger whom you did not care for? So it is with those who love God, they dread offending him.

We find in the Bible that the greatest saints, those early Christians who gave up all they had for Christ's sake, walked "in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ix. 31). We also read in the one hundred and thirtieth Psalm, "There is forgiveness with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared." Not because God is just and punishes sinners, but because he is merciful and forgives them, should we cherish this holy fear.

How many of us are guided,

first of all, by the fear of the Lord! Do we really make all our plans and rule all our acts by God's law? Do we always put his will first and feel that the worst thing that could happen to us would be to fail in fulfilling that will? Do we realize what a small thing the blame of our friends is compared with God's disapproval? These are solemn questions for us to think over if we wish to do this part of our duty toward God.

And now let us turn for a moment from these verses about fear to those that begin with "Fear not." There are so many that it would be impossible to give them all here. There are a number in the Old Testament assuring us that God's people need fear no evil, because he is protecting them, or, as a beautiful old hymn says:

"Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear."

The Gospel message which the angel brought to the shepherds began with "Fear not." "Behold," he said, "I bring you glad tidings of great joy," and it is just that message, those glad tidings which can take away all our fear of the anger of God and fill our hearts with the fear which comes from love, and which makes us day by day more anxious to please God and to be like him.

Let us pray that this fear may rule our thoughts, words and deeds; so that when God's angel comes to call us home he may say to us, as was said once to the Virgin Mary, "Fear not; for thou hast found favor with God."

COLLECT.

O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom thou dost bring up in thy steadfast fear and love; Keep us, we

beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

III.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY HEART.

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MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY HEART.

"We love him, because he first loved us."—1 John iv. 19.

It would be very hard to define and describe satisfactorily the different ways of loving God which are mentioned in the answer we are considering. The first one is expressed by a phrase in common use. We often say that we love some friend with all our heart. It is not easy to describe or reason about that love. It is something which must be felt to be understood. We all know people whom we love because they are lovable, and others who are just as good

do not arouse the same feeling of affection in us.

A little child loves his father, not because he is good or wise, or even because he does so much for his children; for the child generally shows his love for his father before he is old enough to understand what his father is or how much he does for him. But he knows, though perhaps he could not tell us how he knows it, that his father loves him. We can learn a great deal in regard to the Christian life by watching little children, and particularly their love and trust in their parents. We have heard ever since we can remember how much God loves us, how he watches over us and protects us, and plans our life as will be best for us in the end, though we may not see it now. And above all he has proved that he loves us by giving his dear Son to die for us, to save us from sin and

eternal death. Did you ever think that this blessed gift of God was the only thing which could have cost him anything? If our salvation could have been purchased with money or anything of the kind, how easily God could have provided it! If the blood of animals could really wash away our sins, by one word he could have created as many as were necessary, and that without one moment's pain or anxiety. But no; nothing would do the work but, first, the perfect life on earth of the Son of God, who was made man, and, then, his perfect sacrifice on the cross. Could our parents be willing to let us go away from them if they knew that such things were going to happen to us? And yet the Divine Father loved his blessed Son more than our parents love us, because his heart is larger. How much it must have cost him to send that

Son to earth, knowing what the end would be! When we think of all this, is it not strange that we do not love God more than we do?

Many of us have had sorrow to bear, just because we loved some earthly friend so dearly. Perhaps we have stood over a grave and have felt as if we could never be happy again—at least while we were separated from the one whose precious body had been laid there. Or what is often sadder, we may have found out that some one whom we loved very much did not love us at all; perhaps was even deceiving us. There are few trials harder to bear than a disappointment of that kind. Then what a comfort it is to know that the greatest Love of all can never fail us; our heavenly Friend can never die! Surely when we think of this, we shall not find it hard to love God with all our heart.

COLLECT.

O God, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IV.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY MIND.

IV.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY MIND.

"Increasing in the knowledge of God."
—Col. i. 10.

THERE are times when it is well for us to remember that it is impossible for us to fully understand God. The Bible is full of verses telling us that his thoughts are not our thoughts and that his ways are past finding out. So when people say, "I cannot believe that a merciful God would punish his children;" or, "I would not do that if I were God," they forget that it is impossible for them to judge correctly of God's actions because he is so far above them

that they cannot understand him, nor see things as he sees them.

But while it is not possible to understand God entirely, it is our duty to find out as much about him as we can. If you read carefully the prayers which St. Paul offers for Christians in his Epistles, you will notice how often he prays that they may grow in knowledge. This knowledge is a thing which we cannot expect to have all at once ; it is something which comes by degrees. To go back to our figure of the child and the father. The child of a very wise man loves his father long before he can possibly understand all his father's thoughts and words. As he grows older he learns more and more about his father's wisdom, and has a great respect for his knowledge. It often happens that the child never becomes as wise and learned as his father. Perhaps he has not the same tal-

ent ; but he tries to understand as much as he can, so that he may enjoy being with his father and hearing him talk. So if we love God with all our hearts we shall soon learn—at least, we ought to learn—to love him with all our minds.

Then there is another reason why we should study about God, and that is because he has taken the trouble to reveal himself to us to a certain extent. He has told us a great many things about himself in the Bible ; and one of the reasons why our Blessed Lord came to earth was that we might have an idea of God, which we could grasp. When we talk of Jehovah, God Almighty, who made heaven and earth, we are often more or less bewildered. We are unable to imagine him. But when we think of our Lord Jesus Christ, and remember his life here on earth, we can then have some

idea of what God is. Our Lord says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," showing that He was a revelation of the Father. If you have time on Sundays or during vacations, for a little extra study, it would be a good thing for you to try to find out from the Bible something about the character and ways of God. Notice what he is in himself—just, almighty, pure, etc.—and then what he is to us—loving, merciful, long-suffering, and many other things.

Some people are very much afraid of thinking about doctrines, because in the past there have been so many discussions and even battles about the teachings of the Bible. So they say that they will not trouble themselves about what they shall believe, but will simply try to do what seems to be right. Is that loving God with the mind? It is true that we must not trust to

our belief in doctrine to secure our salvation here and hereafter, but must have a personal knowledge of God and a purpose to do right. Still, in the great matters of religion as taught in the Creed and the Catechism, it is only right that we should try to find out what God has really told us about them. The Prayer-Book is a great help to us in understanding the Bible, and it may safely be taken for granted that what it teaches can be found in the Bible; but we shall be wiser and stronger spiritually if we look up those things for ourselves. We may sometimes need to ask the help of our clergyman or our teacher, because they probably have more helps in the way of books and of learning than we have, and can often make a difficult thing plain to us. But in any case let us read the Bible, and think about it. Above all, we should make our-

selves familiar with the earthly life of our Blessed Lord, and as time goes on we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

COLLECT.

O Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life; Grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that, following the steps of thy holy Apostles, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

V.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY SOUL.

V.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY SOUL.

"Be ye therefore followers [R. V., imitators] of God, as dear children."—Eph. v. 1.

As I have said before, it is extremely difficult to make distinctions between these different ways of loving God; above all, between loving with the mind and the soul. I think, however, that the most practical way for us to look at it is to consider that while the love of the mind shows itself by trying to understand as much as possible the object of our affection, the love of the soul carries us one step farther, and makes us wish to be like that object. So if our

love to God is real it will make us wish to imitate him. We often make the mistake of copying *persons* whom we admire. As no human being is perfect, we may be imitating their faults as well as their virtues. So our aim should be to grow as much like God as we can, remembering that our Lord Jesus Christ has shown us how God would have lived the life of a man on earth. Therefore we must try to copy him in little things as well as in great ones. Many persons think that they could die for the benefit of others, or could pardon some very bitter enemy, and yet are unwilling to make some small sacrifice, and perhaps are sulky and jealous about some very trifling matter. There is a very beautiful story about a little girl who was asked how she knew that she was a Christian, and answered: "Because I am trying to do what the Lord Jesus

would do, and behave as he would behave if he were a little girl and lived at our house." She had the secret of the Christian life in trying to be like Christ in all things, great and small. It is very hard to do the right thing always—perhaps even harder to say the right thing or not to say wrong things; because down in the depths of our hearts we do not feel right. If we are trying to be like him our hearts must first be right; then our words and actions will be naturally pleasing to him. How many times do you really think of the meaning of the response which you make after hearing each Commandment, "Lord, have mercy upon us and *incline our hearts* to keep this law"? And yet that prayer, if it came from your heart, would surely in time be answered, and your greatest difficulty would be lessened. A heart perfectly set to

obey God's commandments, a will entirely in agreement with his will, may never be our portion here. Some imperfection will doubtless remain in us until we become like him, by seeing him as he is. But we should try to cultivate this love of the soul, these desires for a higher and holier life which we call aspirations. But aspirations alone will be of little use unless they are met by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit of God. When we think of the countless wicked and foolish thoughts that pass through our hearts every day and leave often a lasting impression upon them, we might well despair, did we not know that the Spirit of God is in our hearts ; and if we yield ourselves to his guidance he will sanctify us and make us finally pure in heart and fit to see God.

COLLECT.

O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life ; Grant us, we beseech thee, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure ; that when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom ; where with thee, O Father, and with thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

VI.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY STRENGTH.

VI.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY STRENGTH.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" —Acts ix. 6.

We have been studying the different kinds of love, and that study would not be complete unless we considered the way in which love shows itself by action. If we are fond of any earthly friends we wish to give them pleasure; to spare them sorrow; to work for them in any way that is possible. Sometimes we do really work for those who are nearest and dearest to us, earning something toward their support, or doing some hard, un-

pleasant task that they may have time to enjoy some pleasure. Even if we are not called upon to help them in these ways, we still find other opportunities for showing our love in little things as well as in great ones.

When we come to think about showing our love to God by our actions, we probably all remember having heard, over and over again, that all our duties should be done for him. This is such an important truth that we must spend a little time in considering it now, even if it is not a new thought. St. Paul says, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." If we really kept this commandment, how different our lives would be! Let us think of all the foolish and idle words which we speak every day; some of them, perhaps, not actually wrong, and yet not worthy of being said in the name of the

Lord Jesus. And how many of our remarks, which we think clever or funny, are not quite right for a Christian to make. That jest which made every one laugh, was not reverent; or that speech which your friends thought so smart, was just a little unkind; we can surely remember such careless words that may have done a great deal of harm.

Then, how much more important every act seems, if we do it for God! A quaint old poet has written:

"Who sweeps a room as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine."
—George Herbert.

Just imagine yourself sweeping a room for God! How carefully you would do it, taking all the time that was needed to be thorough! Nothing would be slighted or overlooked; no corners or dark places would be passed over

because they did not show ; and if any lost property were found, there would be no question about restoring it to the owner, no matter how trifling its value might be. If you think a moment you can reason in the same way about your own daily employment ; whether it is standing behind a counter, or working at a type-writer or sewing-machine, or in a factory. In every case we are told :

> " The trivial round, the common task
> Will furnish all we ought to ask ;
> Room to deny ourselves, a road
> To bring us daily nearer God."

And yet if we really love God with all our strength, we shall not be satisfied with simply using the opportunities that come to us ; but we will try to find others. One great object of our lives will be to advance God's kingdom in every way that we can. Perhaps it will be by asking our friends to go to Church

or to Sunday-school with us; perhaps we may be able to say something to them that will help them in their Christian life. Or we may deny ourselves some little pleasure and save a small sum to spend on spreading the Gospel in heathen countries. And we must also remember that kind acts and deeds of mercy are done to Christ, even if they do not seem to have anything to do with the souls of those whom we help. A little time spent in sewing for some neighbor who has more than she can do, or in taking care of a sick person, or in looking after a baby, so that the baby's mother may have time for other duties, is all work for God, and in due time will bring its reward; perhaps in this world, and surely in that great day when we shall see our Blessed Lord face to face, and hear him say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these

my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

COLLECT.

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

VII.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO WORSHIP HIM.

VII.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO WORSHIP HIM.

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."—Ps. xcvi. 9.

We are all apt to forget that it is a duty to worship God. All who profess to be Christians know that they ought to pray; but very often they think that prayer means simply asking God for what they wish, and they overlook the duty of praising God and offering him spiritual sacrifices.

In the same way, we fail to see the true meaning of going to Church. We talk about going to hear a certain clergyman preach! Perhaps we say that

some other clergyman does not do us any good; therefore we will stay at home, forgetting that the very first and most important object of church-going is worship. This is not the fault of the service. The Prayer-Book shows very plainly how we ought to look at it. You will remember that when we use the full service of Morning or Evening Prayer, we begin by confessing our sins, and listening to the assurance of God's readiness to pardon. This is placed first in the service, because we must have all our sins, imperfections and unworthiness forgiven before we can offer acceptable worship to God. After the Confession come the Chants, Psalms and Lessons, before we begin to ask for anything for ourselves. If we think of it, we shall see how reasonable this arrangement is, because the great lesson, which the Christian religion teaches us, is unselfishness.

Therefore when we come to God, we should think of something besides getting as much out of him as possible. What higher aim could we have than to "worthily magnify his holy Name"?

The Holy Communion is also an act of worship. We sometimes think of it as something meant to make an impression on us, and to remind us of the death of Christ, or as a means of strengthening and refreshing our souls, as the Catechism puts it. All this is true, and ought to be borne in mind; but there is still another view of it, which is that it is a service of praise, according with the meaning of that beautiful word Eucharist. Sometimes we are disappointed when we have received the Communion, because we are not conscious of obtaining any blessing. We do not *feel* stronger and better. In that case, we should remember

not only that we may have received a blessing without perceiving it at the time, but also that we have been taking part in the one great act of worship which Christ himself appointed. Prayer, praise, the study of the Old Testament and preaching were well known before Christ came. Baptism also was sometimes practised, though not with the same meaning as now attaches to it. But the Holy Communion, though instituted at the Passover supper, was after that to be something belonging to the Christian Church only. Therefore it ought to be especially precious to us.

I have called worship a spiritual sacrifice, as St. Paul does more than once in his Epistles. That expression will remind you of the sacrifices of the Jews in the Old Testament times, which have their spiritual lessons for us now. Many persons seem to

think that those sacrifices were all offered to take away the sins of the people who presented them. This is a great mistake. There were sin-offerings, representing the great sacrifice on Calvary, which was finished once for all, and need never be repeated. There were also burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. The first represented a life given up to God's service, which was perfectly exemplified in our Lord's life on earth, and may be more or less imperfectly exemplified in our own lives. The second represented, among other things, all gifts and acts of worship, which came from grateful and loving hearts. You will see, if you think, how we can offer these sacrifices now. Every time we give up our own way and take up our great or our little crosses, we are bringing to God a much better burnt-offering than the Jews could offer.

And every gift which we give to others for Christ's sake; every act of worship to God is a more satisfactory peace-offering than the lambs or kids that were presented in the tabernacle or in the temple.

Let us, therefore, remember that praise and honor rendered to God should be a part of our daily prayers, and that the most acceptable act of worship, in his sight, is a will which is in harmony with his will and a life which is consecrated to his service.

COLLECT.

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

VIII.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO GIVE HIM THANKS.

VIII.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO GIVE HIM THANKS.

"Who daily loadeth us with benefits."
—Ps. lxviii. 19.

We have just been considering the duty of worshipping God. A very important part of that duty is praise. Praise and thanksgiving are much alike; and yet there is a distinction between them. We praise God for what he is in himself; we thank him for what he does for us. When we look at the stars on a clear night and remember that he made them all and multitudes which we cannot see, and that he has fixed a course for each one, so that it never interferes with the others; or when we study the

plants and see how wonderfully they are made, we ought to express the feelings that grow out of our thoughts in words of praise. But if we go farther and remember that he who does all these marvellous things loves each one of us, and plans blessings for us every day, and is never too busy to arrange the little details of our lives, so that everything will work for good in the end, then our hearts should be filled with gratitude, and it would be easy for us to do this part of our duty toward God.

It may seem to us as if we had very little to be thankful for when we see how much more some one else has. Still, let us think about ourselves for a moment and see if we have not many more good things than we deserve.

In the first place, very few of us who read these pages are

alone in the world. Almost every one has some dear friend, some one whose love is worth having. What a blessing this is! Then most of us have some kind of a home; have clothes enough to keep us warm and food enough to keep us from starving. Most of us have a good deal more than this; but even this is something to be thankful for. What a comfort it is, too, to be well! Perhaps we have some little ailment, but on the whole we can go about as we please and do what other people do. Our eyesight is a blessing for which we might well offer a special thanksgiving, when we think how easily we might lose it, and what a terrible loss it would be. It is a great blessing to have an ordinarily good mind; to be able to read and understand the wise thoughts of others, even if we have not any great talent ourselves. We may well

be thankful that we live in this century, when there are so many opportunities to improve our minds and to better our condition, and that we live in this country, where these things are within the reach of all. Of course, I hope you have a great many more mercies to remember; but I have spoken of the most common ones, so that no one might be left out.

But even if we are poor, sick, desolate, unable to use the advantages which others have, we still can find causes for thankfulness, when we think of the blessings which God offers to our souls. We may be poor here; but there is a heavenly inheritance that may easily be ours. We may be sick now in our body, but God can cleanse and heal all diseases of the soul. We may be without earthly friends, but we have a loving Heavenly Father, a Friend that sticketh

closer than a brother, an unfailing Comforter. We may not be able to study as we would like. Some branch of knowledge that is very attractive to us may be forbidden us at present; but no one can hinder us from taking lessons from him who is meek and lowly in heart, and so finding rest unto our soul.

And though death is before us, as something that must come some day, it is not, or at least it ought not to be, something strange and terrible. Since our Blessed Lord died and was laid in the grave, and rose again the third day, his children can look forward, without trembling, to the separation of soul and body, and believe that through the grave and gate of death they may pass to a joyful resurrection.

Are not these great blessings? and is it not our own fault if we are not enjoying them? Surely

the poorest and saddest among us has cause for thankfulness!

COLLECT.

We beseech thee, O God, give us that due sense of all thy mercies that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but with our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

IX.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO PUT MY WHOLE TRUST IN HIM.

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"Trust ye in the Lord forever ; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." —Isa. xxvi. 4.

ONE step leads to another, in this answer, as in many other things. If we study God's mercies to us, in order that we may truly and intelligently thank him, we shall naturally learn to trust him.

The first step toward this blessed trust is the faith that our Lord has really borne our sins and made our peace with God. Many of us think that we must feel in a certain way ; must realize these blessings before they can do us any good. But if we honestly believe in the perfect

sacrifice of the Son of God, and have given our lives into his keeping, we ought to trust him with our souls; even if at first we do not enjoy the *consciousness* of safety. The New Testament is full of verses teaching us that we are reconciled to God; that the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world; and there is the gracious promise, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Therefore if we are sincere in our desire for pardon and daily strength, and are honestly trying to do his will, even though we fail sometimes, we ought not to be troubled or anxious about the future. Sometimes God gives his children very plain assurances of his acceptance of them, and at others, he tries their faith by seeming to leave them alone. But it only seems so. They are never really alone. The Lord Jesus is walking beside them just as he did by

the two disciples on the evening of the first Easter Day, though for a time they did not recognize him.

If we are trusting God for pardon and for salvation, we can well trust him also for the smaller matters of our daily life. It is worse than a waste of time, it is a want of faith to worry, whether about our food, clothes, rent, or anything of that kind, or about the temptations that are sure to come to us. Our Heavenly Father knows all our needs, and with regard to the things of this world, he is sure to give us just what is best for us; and with regard to the needs of the soul, he will work in us his own good pleasure. If we are in earnest in our wish to be as like him as we possibly can, we may comfort ourselves with the words of St. Paul: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." You know that sanc-

tification means holiness ; and if it is God's will that we should be holy, nothing but our will can hinder it. Then let us not be discouraged because we are weak and fall far short of what we wish to be. The grace of God is stronger than the sinful tendencies of our nature, if we will only give ourselves up to him. Indeed, the more we feel our weakness the better it is for us ; for then we are more ready to look to him for strength.

If we have learned to trust him for pardon and for strength, it will not be hard to trust him when the last great change comes. Those who have had Christ with them all their lives may be sure that he will not for sake them in that step into another life which we call Death. Many of us will doubtless be taken away when the time comes, without any knowledge of what is happening to us ; and many

others will be too weak and languid to think clearly about it. But even for those who are called upon to look Death in the face, to realize that their days or hours on earth are numbered, there is no cause of fear ; for the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for us, will be near us to comfort us with his rod and staff and to bring us safely into his eternal kingdom.

COLLECT.

Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people, pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

X.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO CALL UPON HIM.

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"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."—Phil. iv. 6.

THE next step after putting our trust in God naturally is to call upon him. We hear so much of his willingness to listen to our prayers, that it must be our own fault if we cannot tell of answers to them. Not that every prayer is answered just as we wish; but God does not disregard our wishes, and in many ways our prayers are answered, though at the moment we do not see it.

I am taking prayer, now, in its narrowest sense—that merely

of asking. We have considered it as an act of worship when we studied the phrases "to worship him" and "to give him thanks." We cannot remind ourselves too often that God loves to give. He has given us one gift so wonderful, so glorious, and so precious to himself—I mean the gift of his dear Son—that we ought never to question that he is willing to give us the things that we wish, though they must often seem to him to be very small indeed. Therefore it is only a simple conclusion for us to reach, that if he denies us anything that we ask for, he must have some good reason for doing so. We cannot understand all his reasons; but there are two which are always possible. Perhaps what we asked for would in some way harm us; or perhaps, in order to give us pleasure, some one else would have to suffer. You can easily see that

these reasons are good ones for not granting our requests.

But there are some things for which we may ask with the assurance that sooner or later they will be granted—namely, good gifts for the soul. If there is any fault which we wish to overcome, any virtue that we wish to cultivate, make it a subject of prayer; and some day those prayers will be answered. Not perhaps immediately; for all spiritual growth is slow, and God sometimes tries our faith by making us wait a little for our answers. And it sometimes happens that our faults train us in some other virtues. A quick-tempered boy, who is really sorry when he gets into a passion, is learning to be humble, which is one of the hardest of the many lessons that are given us to learn. A girl who has to struggle very hard to be perfectly truthful, and sometimes fails, learns to be gen-

tle and charitable in her judgment of others. So it is well to trust God for our spiritual needs, praying steadily, even if we often seem to make no progress. And one prayer is always safe and satisfying—the prayer for an abundant measure of the Holy Spirit. If he has his abode in our hearts, and those hearts are attentive to his hints and warnings, all other graces will flourish, though we ourselves may not realize it; for as we grow better, we shall also grow more quick to notice the sin which will still cling to us, yet others will see and know that we are the temples of the Holy Ghost.

One word more. It is a narrow view to take of prayer, to think of it as merely asking for things. It is a still narrower view to look upon it as asking only for something *for ourselves.*

How many there are for whom we ought to pray! Our own family; our school friends or fellow-workers; our teachers and pastors; the mission work of the Church; all efforts that are being made to help others, need our prayers, and no one can tell what those prayers may do. It would be well not to leave this duty to chance; but when we have a quiet half hour, think it over and, if necessary, write down all those whom we ought to remember at the throne of grace; some every day; some, perhaps, less frequently. If we know of the needs of our friends, ask that those needs may be supplied; if not, ask God to give them what is best for them, for he knows better than we do. In any case it is right to pray with submission to his will. Let us leave the final decision with him, simply expressing our wishes, and in

heaven, if not here, we shall find that our prayer has done its work.

COLLECT.

Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

XI.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO HONOR HIS HOLY NAME AND HIS WORD.

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"Them that honor me I will honor."—1 Sam. ii. 30.

AFTER thinking and studying about God, as we have been doing, we are inclined to wonder why any one fails to honor him. Surely when we think of all he does for us, it is very strange that we do not make more effort to pay him the respect and honor which are due to him. And yet even those who call themselves Christians often fail in this respect. For example, how many utterly forget that everything which they have comes from him. They

pride themselves on having always earned their own living, and perhaps look down a little on some neighbor who has had to take help from others. And yet it is through God's mercy that they have had health and strength to work, and have had a chance to do so. Sometimes God gives us some special talent, an ear for music or an eye for drawing, or perhaps quickness at languages or arithmetic. Many times we act as if this talent was something which we had obtained ourselves, and fancy that we ought to be praised for it. Yet we are told, over and over again in the Bible, that not only money (though that is spoken of specially) but all good things are given us by God, and the praise for them should be given to him.

We all know that it is wicked to swear, to take God's Name in vain, and would probably be

shocked if any of our companions did such a thing. But reflect for a moment how often we use the most Holy Name without thinking of what we are saying. Can we declare that every time we say the Creed, we mean every word of it? Yet the most solemn truths that have been revealed to us are set forth in the Creed. It is even worse to repeat prayers without thinking of what we are saying. Have we not all been guilty of this very thing? Most of us, I fear, have gone a step farther, and have used holy words in jest. Are we sure that we have never made fun of a Bible verse or a hymn? Sometimes an irreverent jest will make such an impression that it will never be forgotten; then the one who utters it, in addition to the sin against God, does an unkind thing to those who hear him, perhaps by spoiling a favorite hymn or text for them.

We often fail to honor God's Name and Word by talking too carelessly and rashly about religious subjects. This is often done by very young people, who have become deeply interested in some discussion. They talk about the most solemn mysteries of God's revelation to men in a most careless manner—just as they might chatter about some every-day matter. They do not mean to do wrong. This habit often springs from the deepest interest in the subject; but it is nevertheless irreverent and hurtful to those who talk as well as to those who listen. We are often carried away by what is called party-spirit, and condemn, in a most flippant and careless way, something which belongs to the opposite party, without realizing that in itself it may mean something very solemn. For instance, Protestants, as a rule, do not place crucifixes in their

churches, and many have been taught that it is wrong to bow down to one. But if we remember what the crucifix represents; how it is a token of the great Sacrifice on which alone our hopes of eternal life depend, we shall not mock at it and laugh about it, or make a plaything of it, even though in our mind it is associated with wrong teaching and wrong practices.

Reverence is a virtue which is sadly lacking in these days and in this country, where we hear continually that one person is as good as another. If we do not reverence virtue in our fellowmen we shall soon lose all desire to cultivate it in ourselves; and if we do not reverence Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we shall have no one to look up to, no pattern to copy, and shall be content with few aspirations and very little religion.

COLLECT.

Almighty God, who showest to them who are in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may avoid all those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

XII.

MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS
TO SERVE HIM TRULY
ALL THE DAYS OF
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MY DUTY TOWARD GOD IS TO SERVE HIM TRULY ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE.

"If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, . . . I will not go out free, . . . he shall serve him forever."—Ex. xxi. 5, 6.

We have been thinking all this time of our *duty* toward God. But now that we have come to this last clause, I feel like changing the word and saying, "My privilege is to serve him truly all the days of my life." For, after all, we must serve some one. Some are really servants of sin and of Satan; others servants of the world; and every one of us is trying to some ex-

tent to serve himself. It is hard for young people to believe it, but all these masters are tyrants. Self, the world and the devil make us slaves, if we try to serve them ; but God's service is perfect freedom, or, as the original Latin of the collect for peace expresses it, "to serve him is to reign."

Let us look at some of the advantages of serving God. First, his cause is always the right one. We are not wasting our time and strength if we are honestly trying to do his will ; for no matter what difficulties and discouragements we may meet, he is sure to triumph at last, whether in the world at large or in our own sinful but aspiring hearts.

Secondly, his service is permanent. "He shall serve him forever," our text from Exodus says. This thought will be worth a great deal to those who are working for their living. They

know what it is to feel uncertain as to how long they can keep a good place which they have managed to find, they can appreciate the good fortune of any one who has a position for life. The world is apt to drop us as we grow older or poorer. What we call the pleasures of sin (for sin does bring a passing pleasure) are not lasting. Pleasing self becomes very stupid and tiresome after a while, and how often we hear of those who have given themselves up entirely to the service of some one person, some beloved friend, being left desolate, or perhaps cruelly disappointed in the affection for which they sacrificed everything; but there is no fear of change in our Heavenly Master, we can always depend on him.

We might say a great deal about his care for his servants—the tenderness and wisdom with which he plans for their best in-

terests, the help which he gives them in their work from time to time, and the forbearance which he shows toward their mistakes. How fortunate we should think ourselves if we had an earthly employer who exercised one tenth of the consideration toward us that God does! But I will mention only one thing more connected with his service: that is the certainty and abundance of our reward. That reward is twofold: the peace and happiness which spring out of our service while we are working for him here, and the unspeakable blessings that shall come to us hereafter. No pleasure that the world can offer us is equal to the consciousness which God sometimes gives us that he is pleased with us. No praise of men can make us happier than the still small voice in our hearts which sometimes says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

And on the last great day, which has no terrors for God's children, we may hear those words spoken in the presence of all men and angels, and they will be followed by the gracious invitation, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" What that joy is no one can fully know now. But he may be sure that there will be nothing left to wish for, for we shall see our Master face to face and enjoy that "Vision glorious" throughout all eternity.

COLLECT.

Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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